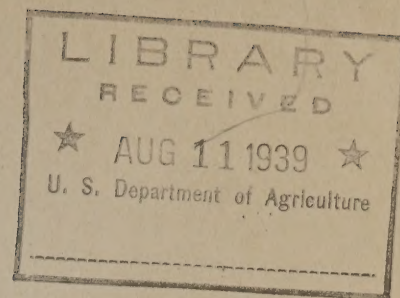


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# CULTURE AND AGRICULTURE

What new concepts have been developed by the social sciences that will contribute to a better understanding of the farm problems of to-day? What data have they gathered that will suggest a better approach to the practical, democratic solution of these problems? A report of one of the sessions of the Conference on Cultural Anthropology sponsored by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in Washington, D. C., May 17-19, 1939.





## CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY CONFERENCE

May 17-19, 1939

### Explanatory Note

A conference on Cultural Anthropology was held in the Department of Agriculture under the chairmanship of Under Secretary M. L. Wilson, May 17-19, 1939. This was the second of a series of conferences with representatives of the various social science disciplines regarding the contribution that each can make to an integrated approach by all the social sciences to the functions and problems of the Department of Agriculture. A principal hope was to find out how the social sciences might contribute to the union of democratic procedures and scientific methods in the development of agricultural planning and policy-making, and in the educational and research activities of the Department in general, and of the reconstituted Bureau of Agricultural Economics in particular. The immediate purpose of the conference was to acquaint workers of the Department with the nature of findings in the field of cultural anthropology that might aid the process of agricultural planning and policy making, and of efficient administration.

Participants in the conference from outside the Department of Agriculture included the following:

Dean Robert Redfield was born and brought up on an Illinois farm homesteaded by his great-grandfather. Professor of Anthropology at University of Chicago; author of "Tepoztlan—a Mexican Village," University of Chicago Press.

Professor Lloyd Warner, University of Chicago, is a native of California; greatly interested in agricultural communities; spent two years with primitive tribes in North Australia; holds the view that there are certain fundamental principles which apply to all men and to all social organizations, both primitive and civilized. Formerly member of Harvard faculty; directed anthropologic studies at Newburyport, Mass., Natchez, Miss., and Ireland; author of "A Black Civilization."

Professor Lynn Smith, born on a small farm in southwestern Colorado; graduate work at Minnesota and Harvard in sociology, with minor in cultural anthropology. Professor of Rural Sociology, College of Agriculture, Louisiana State University. Has made a number of studies in rural communities with the cultural approach. Editor, "Journal of Rural Sociology."



Professor C. M. Arensburg, native of Maryland. Ph. D. in anthropology at Harvard; now teaches cultural anthropology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Worked on Newburyport survey and cultural study in Ireland. Author of "The Irish Countryman," an anthropologic study.

Dr. Charles Johnson, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee; leads in studies of the social sciences in the South, particularly as they relate to the American negro and agriculture.

Dr. E. S. Handy, Fairfax, Virginia, Ph. D. in anthropology at Yale; has been a missionary and student of culture in Polynesia, an authority on culture in the Pacific. Has written a volume "History and Culture in the Society Islands."

Dr. Horace Miner, native of Kentucky. Ph. D. in anthropology at University of Chicago; now teaches anthropology at Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan. Held a Social Science Research Council Fellowship; author of book "A French-Canadian Community."

Dr. Ralph Danhof, University of Michigan; has studied various aspects of social planning in action in the United States and Europe.

Dr. Edwin R. Embree, President of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Principal field: Education. Has carried on field studies in anthropology in the Pacific and supervised cultural anthropological studies for the Julius Rosenwald Fund in connection with negro education.

Dr. Robert E. Park, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Chicago; now at Fisk University. Noted for his development of the social survey and contributions to the cultural approach to social problems.

Dr. John H. Provinse, reared in south central Montana; knows sheep and cattle ranching and irrigated farming. Doctor's degree at University of Chicago. Studied primitive culture in central Borneo. Joint author of "The Social Anthropology of the North American Tribes," University of Chicago Press.



Dr. Donald Young, Professor Sociology, University of Pennsylvania. Secretary, Social Science Research Council. Especially interested in the improvement of the techniques of social research and in the coordination of the social sciences.

Dr. A. R. Mann, for 25 years Dean of College of Agriculture, Cornell University; formerly provost of Cornell University. Honorary life member, Executive Committee, Land Grant College Association; Vice-president, General Education Board, New York City. Especially interested in the social sciences and education in respect to agriculture. Dr. Mann sat in three sessions of the conference as a visiting observer.

Dr. Kimball Young, Professor of Social Psychology, University of Wisconsin. Author of "Source Book of Social Psychology," and "Source Book of Sociology;" co-author of "The Madison Community."

In addition to the scientists from outside, there was a wide representation of people from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, which sponsored the conference, and from the Farm Security Administration and other agencies and bureaus of the Department.

The 300 page stenographic record of the conference is obviously too long for circulation. But since it is believed that many persons in the Department, as well as others cooperating with the Department or interested in its programs, who were unable to attend the conference may be interested in knowing something of the proceedings, the following record of the conversations of the afternoon of the first day has been mimeographed. The first morning session had been devoted principally to brief but informal presentation by some of the administrators of typical problems faced by the action agencies of the Department. The following session, reproduced here with some editorial excisions and clarification, was considered as a general introductory statement by the cultural anthropologists of their point of view, and possible applicability of their discipline to the problems of which they had been briefly told during the morning. On the second and third days more specialized and specific consideration was given to special and specific problems. The recommendations formulated by a special committee, and approved by those attending the conference, follows the close of the dialogue reproduced here.





AFTERNOON SESSION

MAY 17, 1939.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: I think we are ready to begin for this afternoon. Now that our people in the Department have outlined some of the problems of the action agencies in agriculture, it is time to ask the cultural anthropologists to lead off with a statement concerning the point of view of cultural anthropology. After that maybe we can get down to cases. Dean Redfield, will you open up the discussion?

DEAN REDFIELD: Mr. Wilson has apparently put me up here as an introductory example of the species he calls cultural anthropologist. I might feel very much on the spot if I inferred that the complexity of the problems you have suggested is to be met by the easy and pat answers we might be presumed to have at hand. But I take confidence from observing that Mr. Wilson seems to have defined the term cultural anthropologist more in relation to interests, point of view and activities, than in relation to Departmental appointment or other formal designation. I suspect that some of the best cultural anthropologists in this room, or in this country, are formally described as economists, social psychologists, administrators, or sociologists. Cultural anthropology, of course, has its special body of technical apparatus, just as any scientific discipline does. It also has an accumulating store of factual information. But its essence is in a method of approach and in a point of view, and we neither claim nor desire any exclusive patent rights on these. From what Mr. Wilson and others have said, I gather that there exists in this country a considerable number of people with various professional



tags who are studying the problems of rural communities with points of view much more alike than the extremes within the ranks of those who are called anthropologists.

In what was said this morning there seemed to be this much common understanding: The Department in its various bureaus and branches knows something specific and practical concerning means of improving the techniques of farming, of improving crops and livestock, and of the mechanical and technical operations that, if employed, will conserve soil fertility and at the same time provide a plentiful production of those agricultural goods that the nation needs. I take it that there is also some knowledge concerning the supply of credit and of other narrowly economic aspects of rural needs and desires. But most important of all from the point of view I am supposed to represent is the apparent realization of two facts: First, that farmers' problems are not wholly solved by solving the problems of scientific agriculture, and of agricultural finance and marketing; and, second, that these problems are interrelated not only with each other, but also with many other aspects of farm life, however unscientific and uneconomic it may seem to be. There is apparently a notion common among us that in any of the multitude of rural communities where farmers live and farm problems exist, there is a way of living that is made up of a great many customs and institutions. These elements are conceived to hang together somehow and give character and continuity to the community. This assumption that the traditions, the habits, the customs that people in a community live with and by form parts of an interrelated whole, of which one part cannot be crucially disturbed without affecting the others, is presumably an assumption with



which some of us in this room are peculiarly familiar. As cultural anthropologists, we have in fact been working on some kinds of raw materials that involve that assumption.

Most of those of us who have made studies of the culture of primitive peoples have become convinced that you cannot clearly separate one phase of life from the other phases. This is, as I understand, one of the main things that the Under Secretary has brought us here to talk about. It seems to me that if you examine the way of life of people living in a community, you discover that one aspect of life has meaning only in relation to other aspects of their life. You may start anywhere examining the network of habits, customs, traditions, and you find soon that however limited you may have thought the segment of life you began with, as you study it you necessarily run farther and farther into the fabric of culture, until eventually you are enmeshed in the whole. Perhaps one experience I had in a Yucatan community will illustrate this point.

I had not been there very long before I observed that whereas the farmers who lived in a town on a railroad stored their maize as soon as it was harvested in granaries in or near their houses, the village farmers out in the bush built their granary all alone in the very middle of the cleared field. They put their maize in it as it was harvested, and removed the grain only little by little, as they needed it, throughout the year. Since theft of maize had been a problem in the town, this custom of the village farmers of leaving their corn unguarded in granaries far out in the field interested me greatly. The simple, obvious, easy explanation might have been that for various reasons it was economically most efficient to leave the maize in this field granary. But such an explanation would not have been correct.

I got my first inkling of the very complicated explanation when I accompanied one of those Indian farmers to his field one day. He was getting the land ready to plant. Having cleared the ground by burning the field brush, he erected in the middle of the cleared tract way out there in the forest a little platform, and on the platform he put a bowl of cornmeal and water. Then he knelt before it and prayed three times, simple little Catholic prayers, although he was himself an Indian.

After that we began talking about why he did this, and I learned something about what his notions were of the field and the crop and the harvest. I don't want to talk at length about the customs of his particular people, but I want to suggest that I learned a great deal about the planting, harvesting, and storing of the corn. I learned why the granary was built where it was, and that all these facts were related to an enormous number of other facts in the everyday life of



these people.

The cornfield itself, for example, was always regarded as square. No matter how many sides it had, they spoke of it as square, and of the east, west, south and north corners. The little platform they put out was always rectangular, and oriented to the north, south, east, and west directions. The notion was that the principal deities that watched over the corn had their watching posts, so to speak, in each of the four alleged corners of the field. When I became familiar with the complicated procedures and ceremonies, it became quite apparent that they involved a little drama in which the conception that the farmer had of his field was made plain, and in which the relation of the farmer's field to his gods was explained to him and to his community over and over again.

I learned a lot of interesting things just from attention to language. For instance, corn when it grows in the field has one name. That name is a word that is practically synonymous with spiritual essence. As soon as the corn is harvested and put into bags for sale, it takes on another name. But since the first name exists practically in a context of prayer, you can't say it without implying some relation to the gods. The conception that they had of the gods that watched over the cornfield, their notions of how to behave towards corn and treat it as sort of a respected person, were all in a sense a part of the conceptions they had of their own society.

When we came finally to compare the culture of the bush villages with that of the towns that had sustained new, foreign and urban influences, we found that it was much more difficult in the towns to recognize this interrelation of various customs and habits. We found

it harder to put down on paper or in diagram just how these people and their institutions constituted a structure. Things seem to wear down at the points of connection. The farmer doesn't have so many reasons in the town for what he does. Their religious ceremonies aren't perhaps being performed, and the large family is no longer present; so there is much less reason for what he does. The social sanctions that in the bush villages were respected and vital were falling into disuse. There was a kind of disintegration of the older Indian village culture. Somewhere in the complex fact of the decline in vitality of the traditional sanctions is probably the explanation of why theft of corn was a problem in the town but not a problem in the bush villages. The question also arises that as to whether under some circumstances of flux there is any unified culture at all with a particular meaning and content. It is a good working hypothesis, perhaps, to conceive that when a culture is altered, it does not change piecemeal, bit by bit, but rather behave more like a pattern in a kaleidoscope--you juggle it and it shifts itself into something else.

If you seek to find out why those who have moved to the towns down there now keep their maize in town granaries instead of in the field, you will find that the answer also involves you in a great many things that have happened to the religious life and community organization in the towns as differentiated from the villages. The very simple physical fact of moving the granary, therefore, involves alterations in the whole cultural structure.

MR. GLICK: It seems that the peculiar and distinctive characteristic of cultural anthropology is the understanding of the interrelatedness of the innumerable traits that make up a culture, and the assumption



that they constitute a pattern. The political scientist is content to look at what we are traditionally agreed to define as political behavior and political institutions. The economist is content to look at what we are traditionally agreed to define as economic behavior and economic institutions, and so on. The peculiar contribution of the cultural anthropologist seems to lie in that he says that no one of these disciplines is in itself sufficient to give us an accurate account of why things happen and people behave as they do, and therefore no one of them is sufficient to answer even the "political" or "economic" problems with which they are chiefly concerned.

DEAN REDFIELD: I should certainly not want to quarrel with that statement, though I should like to suggest some qualifications and amendments. In the first place, I should not wish to question, even by implication, the necessity for investigation of social phenomena within relatively narrow and specialized fields. The specialities contribute data that aid our total understanding, even though we may sometimes wish they sought more consistently to relate themselves to the broader aspects of social life. In the second place, although cultural anthropology has tried to see the entirety of a culture, and has sensed the interrelatedness of phenomena within a given culture more consistently and more deliberately than other social science disciplines, cultural anthropologists are by no means the only ones who have held this view or sought this kind of understanding. And it should perhaps be said in passing that cultural anthropology is to an unusual degree indebted to the other sciences for materials it uses and has assimilated. What may be unique in cultural anthropology is the very emphasis it places upon recognition of the fact that human societies

exist largely in terms of an organized body of institutions and customs that are traditionally transmitted, and that that body is a guide for the actions of the individual, a warrant and an authority for what he wants to do, and which seems to say to him "This is right; and that is wrong. This is the reason why you should do this. This is the reasonable way to do this."

Furthermore, cultural anthropology assumes that from the raw materials of a culture that you observe and experience, you can abstract the motif of life within that culture. And that involves consideration of all aspects of life. That motif is, for instance, particularly manifest in the traditions, symbols, stories, myths, and valued objects and things which are emphasized in rearing and teaching the young. Out of the parts, a whole can be discerned.

MR. GLICK: There is a specific difficulty that bothers me when I try to consider the application of this point of view or method. It would seem that if you want to understand what is happening in a particular phase of a culture, or if you want to calculate the effect of a single new element introduced into a particular segment of activity within a culture, it is not enough to know only those things that are regarded as immediately relevant. For example, to understand the full effect of regulating a certain part of the economic order, as a policy of discouraging monopolies, or of taxing certain kinds of income in a new way, it is not enough to know what the economist can contribute. It is not enough even to know in addition what political scientists would contribute. You would have to know the whole pattern of the culture. You would have to know the family institutions, the sex



mores, the religious patterns, the educational and intellectual institutions--all of the multitude of other things the cultural anthropologist is concerned with--before an analysis and interpretation could be rendered. This seems to include so much that it almost ceases to be practical as a method of social analysis and investigation.

DR. ARENSBURG: That is a perfectly logical point, as I see, except that it is carried to an extreme. You make a reductio ad absurdum. There was never a specialist within even the most restricted field of scientific investigation who knew everything about even that narrow speciality. Physicians who practice solely as diagnosticians may specialize as diagnosticians of the whole body, or may specialize as diagnosticians of certain organs, certain parts of the body, or of certain ailments. None of these specialists knows everything about his field, yet they function usefully. And the general diagnostician is I believe as valuable as the rest. If I may make the analogy to consider cultural anthropologists as social diagnosticians, I should say that they specialize as scientific analysts of the whole. What is unique about their diagnosis is that unlike economists, political scientists, and others, he tries to take into account some view of all the cultural phases in a society. He is a specialist in considering the whole, and in the interrelationship of the parts.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: Dr. Warner, I think it's time for you to add something to what has been said. If an object is to be lighted up distinctly, so that all its characteristics stand out clearly, there must be light cast upon it from many angles.

DR. WARNER: A part of what I wanted to say has already been said. Since that would be more light from the same angle, I won't repeat, but will try to work on a tangent. It seems to me if you look at society as a problem-solving device, or problems-solving device, you are employing a point of view that can be made very useful. As I look at it, there are three kinds of problems that societies solve, or try to solve. It doesn't make any difference whether that society is a primitive hunting and gathering group in Australia, or whether it is a people devoted to commercial agriculture in modern America, or whether it is a highly sophisticated steel and electrical civilization in Chicago. It happens that I have made some anthropological investigations among all these classifications, and the concept has worked for me. The first kind of problem is that of adjustment to the natural environment, and that means the problem of making a living and being comfortable with the natural resources at hand, and taking care of children and the older generations. This might be called, briefly and not too accurately, the problem of technology.

Next, there is the problem of how people relate themselves to each other so they get a fair degree of satisfaction and a minimum of conflict among themselves. This is the problem of social relationships. It includes the problem of adjusting the technology to the needs of the people. This in turn has two major phases. First, there is the problem of a division of labor in the handling of tools, and the division of the goods produced by their use. That is one function of social organization. That is, so to speak, the sphere of economics. The other problem concerns family behavior, or, more generally, the problem of



relating the sexes together satisfactorily so they will reproduce and take care of the new generation, and give it a sufficient amount of the traditional culture to insure that it will not lose it. Within that second category is the system of values we live by, live for, and live with.

The third kind of problem that societies solve is that of adjustment of man's fate to the unknown. That kind of adjustment is one that all societies and all people make one way or another. It tends on the whole to integrate the rest of the society, if it is functioning well, because it provides a system of over-all beliefs, of absolute values and ideologies by which people live together.

Those are the three kinds of problems that all societies try to solve; and it is a very interesting fact that the older, simpler societies frequently solved these problems better for their people by the standards of human happiness than do the more complex societies. You could lay human societies out in a range, beginning with the very simple, undifferentiated type of society, over through the more complex societies, until we get to one like ours, which would probably be the most complex. According to some criteria, it would be difficult to rank our society with others. But in a scale of complexity, Australian primitives would belong to one extreme, and our society would belong to the other. Now, within that range certain things are apparent. The more complex the technology, the more complex the social organization tends to be. High technological development, increasing division and specialization of labor, complex social organization, all these things tend to foster elaborations of rank, caste, and class within a society. Homogeneity in a

society with simple technology and simple social organization becomes heterogeneity in a highly developed technology with a complex social organization.

That brings up a very fundamental problem we have to consider all the time here in modern America. The question I was asking you this morning about your problem in trying to maintain democracy is involved in this. The Australian aborigines that I studied and lived with were a completely democratic people. They are the only people I have ever seen that were. Other simpler people, the American Indians, for instance, were like that. In our contemporary American society, we have a partial democracy, but it is not the complete democracy of simpler people. I don't believe most people today want to be completely democratic. Yet the higher the division of labor, the greater is the need for efficiency of the several parts, and the greater is the need for relating the several parts to each other. Only this can prevent chaos, social maladjustment, and other similar things that worry us as Americans. I think it is a fair generalization to say that the higher division of labor the greater heterogeneity of individuals you have, the greater are both the need and the difficulties of integration. And the difficulties of the anthropologist in analyzing the culture are correspondingly greater. It is still possible to make such studies--definitely possible--but more difficult because the problem is more complex. Let me cite just one simple instance of this. It is difficult for us here and now to communicate perfectly. Why? Because we occupy different places in a social system. We may use the same words, but they have different meanings according to the technical background and social place out of which they come.



MR. MADDUX: In what you have just said, Dr. Warner, you suggest one of the difficulties that has been uppermost in my mind. Most people associate anthropology exclusively with the study of primitive or prehistoric people. I imagine that most people--most educated people--would be very surprised to learn that anthropology claims any interest in, or any capacity to deal with, the problems of complicated modern civilizations. I do not subscribe to that view myself, yet it seems to me there has been an admission that the method of cultural anthropology runs into new difficulties when it is applied to a complex modern culture. I should therefore like to hear something further on the adequacy of the cultural anthropological approach for dealing with the modern situation, and also something just a little bit more specific concerning the methods that cultural anthropology would employ. I have in mind the fact that most communities today are visibly very subject to an infiltration of all sorts of influences from the outside that must affect the internal integrity of their cultural pattern.

DEAN REDFIELD: If there is any thesis that we are here to defend, it is the thesis that cultural anthropology, using its characteristic over-all approach, can make a study of a modern community. This, however, does not deny the perfectly valid point that difficulties multiply as complexities grow.

I don't believe I know how to answer your question concerning methods appropriate to a situation where outside influences are very strong. I have my own doubts concerning the full adequacy of our method for dealing with such situations. There are, however, several who have been working under conditions like that.

DR. ARENSBURG: In a sense I have tried it. I tried it in a community in Ireland that was not very different from many communities in this country. After all, Ireland is not very far off the stream of our Western European culture. There are a great many people in the country there who are undergoing the cultural change that accompanies an entrance into wholly commercial agriculture on a large, capitalistic scale. It seems to me that the kind of approach we have been talking about can be fruitfully used even in such a situation.

DR. BLAISDELL: A question in my mind is how you can get at the really fundamental questions in the modern scene if you confine yourself to a community. How, in fact, do you go about it to define the limits of the community you study?

DR. ARENSBURG: I began my study with a unit already roughly determined. It was a county set around a market seat--a county like many in the United States--with a population of about 50,000 that traded in a market center of about 6,000 people. This little community had some consciousness of itself as a unit. The people there referred to themselves as members of a group, had names for themselves, and for outsiders. The study began, so to speak, in the center and worked out until the borders of a new community were reached. We traced lines of interaction and interrelation that involved a great variety of institutions. There was a certain configuration, however, that tied together all of these institutions within the limits of the area we studied. So there was a very perceptible kind of internal unity. On the other hand, each of the institutions had connections that led out of the community. That fact complicates the picture a bit, perhaps,



but it is entirely possible to take it into account.

DR. WARNER: I think it's worth some emphasis that the nature of the problem--the nature of the questions you want answers for--determines what your method will be, and it also determines the community you study. Arensburg wanted to study a town in relation to a countryside, so he chose the market town of Ennis, a county seat, and the surrounding community of the county. If he had had a different problem, his area, and to an extent his method, would have been different. That much, I believe, is just common sense.

MR. GLICK: I have a question that relates to this, and also relates to a question I asked earlier this afternoon. Suppose you were asked to answer a very specific question concerning the probable effects of a specific administrative policy upon a certain area. How would you go about it to answer that question? And how intensive and how extensive a study would you have to make of the community in question before you could answer that question?

DEAN REDFIELD: We would have to know just what the specific question was before we would know precisely what methods should be employed.

DR. PROVINSE: Concerning the degree of thoroughness of the study, that too would depend wholly on the question. There has been a little intramural bickering on this point, yet I believe it is now safe to say that the study should proceed just far enough to permit a correct answer to the problem. That is, the depth of the study would not be the same in all cases. Some questions of the general nature you suggest might be answered rather quickly, while others would require a very

intensive study. The only constant factor would be the over-all point of view that insists upon the interrelationship of all phases of a culture, and therefore not only tries to see things as a whole, but realizes that both effects and determinants of, let us say, an economic fact, ramify into spheres of life and activity that are religious, moral, familial, and so on. I am confident of the application of this point of view whether the culture in question is relatively simple, stable, and to a high degree integrated, or whether it is complex, in state of flux, and not well integrated.

DR. WARNER: I think there can be no doubt that outside influences are very important, especially in this country. In studying a community, it is ordinarily not enough to learn the internal nature of that community. Its relation to other communities, and to the outside world generally, may be a crucial part of the situation. One of the greatest problems today seems to me to be a way of relating together on a satisfactory basis the people of different communities. Many a single community works out very well if left alone. But if it related to another community, all sorts of things happen that break down the way of life that the people of that community had found satisfactory.

DR. SMITH: There are two or three general remarks I should like to make here. Many social scientists are just beginning to learn the importance of culture as a determinant of individual and social development. Some, I fear, may not even have begun to realize it. People use the term "human nature" as if it were exclusively determined by biological factors and thus fixed and static for all time. Others go in for heavily emphasized geographical determinism, or still other kinds of determinism



that ignore cultural factors. :

Some people seem to think that scattered farmsteads conform to some innate characteristics of "human nature," whatever that is. Some of those people even consider that there is something essentially sacred in the isolated farmstead. Others consider them the result of geographical dotorminants.

It happens that I came from a Mormon community in the West where the agricultural village was the rule. Yet neighboring communities with the same geographical features, and peopled similarly by old American stock, had scattered farmsteads because their cultural inheritance was different. And there was a striking difference in almost all the characteristics and in the general nature of those two cultures. In Louisiana, I have studied rural communities with a cultural inheritance from France, and agricultural villages are again the rule. Yet nearby, in identical geographical environment, are people who live in scattered homesteads. These are totally different cultures, and the village or scattered homestead feature is just one of innumerable phases and indications of that difference. The people who live in the one culture consider that the various features of their culture are "natural," and to move villagers into scattered homesteads would seem to them unnatural and would incur resentment for a score of reasons that would end up by being moral reasons, religious reasons, and even patriotic reasons.

DR. PARK: If the traits of the culture they live under do not seem "natural," then it is probably a sign that the culture is changing.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: Dr. Johnson, you have had some experience trying to answer specific, practical questions by using the point of view

and method of cultural anthropology. Would you tell us something of your experience?

DR. JOHNSON: I do not claim to be a cultural anthropologist--merely a sociologist--but I have wandered a bit into the field of cultural anthropology. This came about when I was asked to answer a practical question regarding whether or not a proposed health program planned for all the Negro population of a certain county would be sufficiently well understood by that population to be feasible. We went in and began a study of a large number of families, and aimed our procedures as directly as possible at the single question we had to answer. But we soon found that we had to extend our investigations into a great many other phases of the life of these families. For example, the first problem was just what conception the families had of disease and cure, and that carried us into the question of beliefs that they entertained regarding disease, and how they responded to some of the newer conceptions of modern medicine and hygiene. Our first intimation of the extent of the cultural isolation of the group came out of this, and that carried over into the ability to support independently medical services. That carried into the question of their earnings and economic folkways, and this led us necessarily to inquire into their ability to absorb new economic ideas and practices. This in turn took us over into an examination of the procedure and content of the education that they were getting, and of their general outlook on the community, and their general outlook on life. These were questions that couldn't be handled by the usual sociological procedures, and we attempted to get it by some



other devices. We were driven by necessity, I guess, into the point of view and method of cultural anthropology. We gave some attention to their religious expression and family recreation, to their conception of themselves as persons and as a group, and their attitudes toward the larger community, the White community, and so on. In the end we found ourselves perhaps better able to make practical suggestions regarding the health program in question. But we almost forgot the health program while in the process of getting information for it because of the illumination which a great deal of this material shed on a score of other problems, notably, for example, on the behavior of these families outside of that setting, in the towns and the cities. Much urban behavior could be readily apparently traced back to these habits and folk ways set in this particular type of rural environment.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: There are several others here I want to call upon to tell of their research and their experiences as anthropologists working among modern peoples with a culture including modern machine technology. But before that begins I want to make my little speech.

First of all, I want to say a word about names. This morning, someone said--I believe it was you, Dr. Warner--that it didn't make any difference whether you called this thing we're talking about cultural anthropology, or social anthropology, or comparative sociology. Now ordinarily I don't think names of things are very important, not, at least, of any importance by themselves. But I like the term "cultural anthropology" because it seems to me very accurate in what it suggests. "Anthropology" gives perspective in its suggestions of a view

of mankind. It suggests consciousness of man's long past, and where man came from, and in doing so ought to dispel static notions that man was always, and always will be, just as he is today. The word "cultural" suggests to me the emphasis upon culture, the attention to the whole of man's life and traditions and customs--without breaking man's activities up into artificial compartments--that is the essence of the point of view of cultural anthropology. So I hope we cling to the term "cultural anthropology" simply because it seems peculiarly apt.

The next thing I want to say is that I have been very pleased as I sat here to observe that none of the non-anthropologists present have seemed shocked to learn that anthropology can deal with modern man and modern society. I had a notion that many people were inclined to confuse anthropology with archaeology, and thought of anthropologists only as people with a quaint love of prehistoric skulls and stone age tools. Or else, I thought they imagined anthropologists as explorers of remote places, who observe how cannibals cook their meat. I'm sure that most of us have a deep interest in man's prehistoric past, and even, perhaps, in cannibals and pignies. And anthropology of course does not ignore these. But I am pleased that it has just been taken for granted that cultural anthropology can and does concern itself with modern men living in modern civilized society. The most vital and fastest growing portion of anthropology, I believe, is the portion that studies modern cultures, and I am glad to know that this fact is widely appreciated.

And now for the end of this little speech of mine. When we were talking this morning about the activities of the various agencies of the Department of Agriculture, it was understood in what was said, I



believe, that legislative and administrative policies that are aimed to improve one phase of agriculture or farm life sometimes run into snags because they affect some other aspect of farm culture that the legislators or administrators had not considered because they thought that the policy affected only the one phase they had in mind. I believe it was pretty well understood among the Department people here this morning that when farmers change the way they plow their fields, or change from one to another crop, that they are likely to have to change a great many other activities and habits. And I believe they realize that a policy aimed to accomplish a single good purpose may fail if it runs, either directly or indirectly, against some well-established tradition or attitude. And they also realize, I believe, that a single good purpose may under some circumstances have total effects that are bad because the farmer, in altering his ways to accomplish the one good purpose, may disturb other good, established customs that would be better off undisturbed, and the total effect is then bad rather than good. Now, from what we have said this afternoon, it seems to me that cultural anthropologists are, of all people, the most qualified to tell us what the total effects of a given policy will have. And if that is true, we should begin to consider what practical means might be employed to enable cultural anthropology to make this practical contribution.

MR. GLICK: It seems to me that the cultural anthropologist should also tell us something of cultural values. Shouldn't it be part of his function, in an age of unusual cultural flux, when a particular government policy, for example, may conceivably determine whether natural forces of change will lead in one direction rather than another,

to tell us which changes will on the whole enrich human life, which would have the greater human values?

DEAN REDFIELD: As lay individuals, we have our own personal scales of value. As cultural anthropologists, as scientists, we cannot speak on the question of values. It is outside our province, to do so would be to assume an omniscience we do not claim.

MR. GLICK: Does that mean that the cultural anthropologist has no concern with definitions of value? That all cultures are equally good if to an equal degree they adjust a group of people to their environment, regardless of qualitative differences in the adjustments?

DR. MINER: If I may draw an analogy, the cultural anthropologist is like a physicist who can determine the explosive powers of various materials. That is his business, but what the explosive powers are used for is not his concern as a physicist.

MR. GLICK: That is the usual attitude of scientists, I know, but I should like to explore a contrary hypothesis. Science that is unconcerned with values seems to me to meet only half its problems, and to stop short of integrating its particular contribution of knowledge into the decisions which men must make. We need a science of values, I believe, as much as a science of physics or of economics. Furthermore, it seems to me that cultural anthropology is the one science peculiarly endowed for the task of applying scientific methods to the analysis and definition of values.

DR. WARNER: That is right--scientific methods can apply to the analysis of values. That would be part of the job. In studying a culture, you cannot avoid attention to values in varying forms. But to declare one value better than another value in a culture would mean



specifically to intrude your personal judgment, which would be determined by the interactions of your own individual endowments and the culture in which you grew. And generally it would be to desert your role as a scientist and adopt the role of a citizen. It might be proper for the philosopher to discuss values, and as amateur philosophers we could do it for you, but not as cultural anthropologists.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: I think I would agree with Dr. Warner. To me, the problem of values is over in the field of philosophy and religion. And in the determination of which values are best, which values we want, and which values we shall pursue, we must function as philosophers, as religious believers, and above all as citizens--not as scientists.

DEAN REDFIELD: If we may return now to Under Secretary Wilson's question concerning the practical application of the methods of cultural anthropology for the solution of administrative policies, I think it should be said at the outset that there can be no general answers to general questions. We do not have general propositions concerning the nature of society that are sufficiently specific and dependable to enable us to predict the outcome of any comprehensive program. We could, however offer procedures and a point of view by which you could answer that question in regard to a specific program and a particular concrete group of communities. If you will tell us what change is being considered, and name the communities for which it is proposed, we could help you to find out what will probably happen. In cases where programs have already come into operation, we could go into the community and find out something of the total effect of that program.

DR. WARNER: There is another observation I should like to add here. In the case of rural rehabilitation and other Farm Security

Administration programs that presumably deal with the less privileged third of the population, it is very likely that the effects of the program are not limited to that third.

MR. TOLLEY: The policies administered by the Department have been laid down by Congress. That means they express the will of the majority of the people according to the procedures of our democratic society. We as administrators know that. But we also know even if the general lines of policy are so determined, it is not only up to the administrator to make them work, but it is also a fact that the little day to day decisions that the administrator must make color the policy, and sometimes shape it critically. What I'm interested to learn is how cultural anthropology can help to improve those little day to day decisions administrators have to make.

DEAN REDFIELD: That is a large order. I doubt that there is sufficient knowledge available concerning society to enable us to predict on the spot how various programs guided from the outside will eventuate. But we could show the persons concerned with such programs the social dimensions of the problem they were dealing with.

MR. TOLLEY: Well, but just becoming aware of it leaves us in a bewildered state.

DR. PROVINSE: Bewilderment caused by awareness of the dimensions and ramifications of a problem is not all loss. It's a step beyond ignorance of their existence, and may be followed by clearing perception of their real nature. There are at least some cases where knowledge is already available upon the basis of which sound advice may be given. Generally, of course, the cultural anthropologist can contribute to the solution of a problem only when he is particularly, intimately familiar



with the community in question. When that is the case, he can collaborate with the technical expert and the administrator. Technical experts are sometimes inclined to devise programs to bring about desirable technical improvements in a way that ignores some strongly established cultural factors. Then when the program fails they say it is wholly unworkable. If, however, the program is properly adjusted to the prevailing culture pattern, it can be made a success. That sort of thing has to my knowledge actually happened with the soil conservation program among the Navajoes in Arizona.

MR. MADDOX: I'm glad to hear you say that, because it has sometimes seemed to me that the emphasis of the point of view we have been talking about was upon the inertias, the obstacles to change and improvement. When emphasis gets placed upon the role and importance of habit, custom, tradition, and on, and we are made aware that one little change upsets the whole pattern, the total impression is likely to be one favoring a static conception of society.

DEAN REDFIELD: I think I can understand how the point of view of cultural anthropology might disturb any expectations that a culture could be quickly, entirely, and painlessly made over. It should upset any notion that alleged bad features of a culture could be changed without some alteration of those features believed to be good. But cultural anthropology does not hold a static view of society. We know that cultures change, and one of my own greatest interests concerns certain phases of the dynamics of change. Furthermore, if as scientists we say that a given economic or technological change will alter the religious or family life of a community, it does not mean that we necessarily counsel against it. It would be merely a statement of fact,

and value judgments would have to be made by others. All we should insist upon would be that those indirect culture effects would, or did, occur.

We know that within an integrated culture people must have something to live for as well as things to live with. That is simple, and vastly important. We know that an integrated culture includes both a variety, and a balance, of cultural activities. We know that to the people within the culture in question, having something to live for, having a variety and balance of institutionalized activities, and having all of these fairly well integrated into a way of life, is vitally important. But that does not mean we oppose change, nor does it mean we don't know change occurs. It simply means, I believe, that we have an idea of the ramifications of what may superficially seem a simple, single alteration.

If as cultural anthropologists we have any peculiar virtues as advisers in matters of reform planning or administration, it would come from the perception of the configuration that men's activities tend to become. I take it from what was said this morning that difficulties in planning and administration generally arise out of those phases that are not considered, frequently because it is not realized that these other phases are really concerned. This inter-relatedness may very properly be considered a special concern of the cultural anthropologist. So I think it is proper to believe he can reasonably be called on for advice. But his advice must be specific advice for a specific situation with which he is thoroughly familiar. There may be a few cases now where an anthropologist already knows a specific situation well enough to give competent scientific counsel. But ordinarily he would have to make a special study, for his field of competence is the local cultural unit,



and these differ almost infinitely. The precise nature, scope and depth of the requisite study would be determined by the nature of the problem.

UNDER SECRETARY WILSON: It is getting late, and we must adjourn this session now. But before we go I want to ask unanimous consent to repeat something Deane Redfield just said, and I hope the stenographers will underline it. Within an integrated culture,--and that means a culture that offers the chance for satisfactory living and the flowering of individual capacities and happiness--people must have something to live for, as well as things to live with. As a matter of philosophical understanding, that can't be emphasized too much, and as we try to coordinate our general philosophy with our daily life and work, it can't be applied too much either.

Today we've talked in pretty general terms. That has been necessary, and I think we've gained in general understanding from it. We've proceeded far enough to realize, I believe, that a general point of view is crucially important, but also that the manner of handling specific problems must necessarily be individualized with the various individual problems. We can't expect to get any pat answers to specific problems right here and right now. The next question before us seems to be to find some way of articulating what cultural anthropology can offer with the administration of action programs. That may mean some new research, and some new administrative devices. It may mean a little education, too--education for all of us. But I suggest we adjourn now and take up that question tomorrow morning.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE WITH REFERENCE TO  
CONFERENCE OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS

The discussion has revolved around two topics: (1) What characterizes the point of view represented by the cultural anthropologists; and (2) how can this point of view be made effective in the action programs of the Department of Agriculture.

It has been indicated that cultural anthropology studies the whole of man's social behavior as it can be observed in the group life of human beings. Such behavior consists of (1) man's technical adjustments to his natural environment; (2) his conventional relations with other human beings in his community; and (3) his religious beliefs, values and practices.

The first type of adjustment the cultural anthropologist studies includes the making and using of tools and the kinds of natural environment to which the technology is related. The second type of adjustment is the social organization which interrelates all the members of a given group in a coherent and regulated manner and which solves such general problems as the division of labor and of the goods from such labor; it also provides such formal and informal relations between individuals as those which we call the family, economic and political institutions, the adjustment of the younger generation to the accepted ways of behavior of the community and any other customary forms of social life which are part of the total activities of the group.

Although the cultural anthropologist deals with the whole community, it is not his work to make such specialized studies as those done with the techniques of the economist, the political scientist or the representatives of other special disciplines. The special problems with which these latter disciplines are faced are only to be solved by the methods which are peculiar to those fields. The role of the cultural anthropologist must be one of collaboration with other social sciences.

The essential character of the viewpoint is thus found to lie in the following general observations or assumptions:

(1) The ways of living in a society constitute a whole of inter-related parts. It completes our understanding of any institution or custom to comprehend its relations with others characterizing the community and to define its place in a total organization of traditional ways. Similarly, this viewpoint assumes that a change in an element in the community, such as, for example, modification in a form of land distribution, may result in changes in other parts of the total organization.

(2) The viewpoint thus brings into a single framework more special viewpoints, such as consideration of the economic or the technological system, which abstract from the whole some particular aspect. More specially it supplements such special viewpoints by including in consideration less commonly considered aspects of the community life, such



as the social organization, the moral system and the other ultimate values of the people. The viewpoint implies that rural societies like all others exist not merely in terms of a rational order responsive to practical and deliberate considerations, but also and very largely in terms of a personal, moral and non-rational order. The exponents of this point of view claim a contribution in their emphasis that men must not only have something to live with but something to live for. The modes of living of farmers or of any other people tend to involve or to develop conventional understandings as to what is right and proper which lie outside the limits defined by efficiency or expediency.

In further defining the scientific (as distinguished from the philosophic) character of this viewpoint, the discussion brought out that this group of cultural anthropologists do not regard themselves, as scientists, as concerned with the fixing of objectives. Application of the viewpoint may be expected to improve and to organize knowledge as to how to reach objectives or as to how proposed action programs are tending to reach, or may be expected to reach, objectives otherwise defined.

If cultural anthropology is to contribute effectively to a balanced attack on problems of agriculture, this contribution must be through making available the concepts, methods and data of the cultural anthropologists. In some measure this may be done by bringing present research and administrative personnel in agriculture into general contact with anthropologists and anthropological publications. The extent to which this approach may be depended upon, and the educational methods to be used are matters which warrant examination. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that regardless of what other procedures are accepted, this one may not be entirely neglected.

Means must also be considered for giving to the work of the cultural anthropologists a convincing reality in terms of specific problems of rural life. Because anthropological research has not been directly concerned with such problems, various possible ways for reorienting existing research findings and for assuring adequate new research on agricultural questions must be developed. In this connection, the following suggestions are offered:

- (1) Since administrators must make judgments promptly as occasion demands, it is obviously impossible to undertake special research every time some action question is up for decision. Whenever such decision involves changes in customary patterns of behavior, the possibility that the accumulated store of anthropological knowledge may have some conclusions of fact or interpretation bearing on the problem may be examined. The question is here raised whether provision might not well be made for the preparation of working memoranda, bringing together significant anthropological material as a part of regular administrative procedure when justified by the nature of the problem facing the administrator.

- (2) There is reason to believe that research on rural cultural problems may be planned so that a body of significant data and some knowledge of cultural relationships may be built up in anticipation of



administrative needs. Several types of research approaches suggest themselves for consideration:

(A) Perhaps a series of studies of communities as culturally integrated wholes might be useful. For example, it would be possible to compare communities of divergent ethnic origin, communities in which different agricultural projects had been initiated, or communities otherwise differentiated by some outstanding characteristic, in an effort to achieve a better understanding of the role of interrelated cultural factors in the success or failure of the people in terms of U. S. D. A. goals.

(B) Although the cultural anthropologist emphasizes the necessity for understanding cultures as a whole, some problems lend themselves to attack of a less comprehensive nature. Thus, it is possible to frame research projects aimed directly at some definite aspect of social behavior. For illustration, it might be feasible and useful to study agricultural techniques and tools as a part of culture, or to examine family structure and function in relation to a proposed rehabilitation project.

(C) A third possible type of research project offered for consideration might be described as the pilot study. The purpose would be to plan and execute research studies of a relatively simple nature and on a small, inexpensive scale, in the hope that they would serve as guides for further work by personnel not trained in anthropology. The emphasis would be on the collection of data of kinds susceptible to objective and accurate treatment by professionally untrained workers.

How may personnel be affected by the point of view here expressed, and how may new personnel be developed to express it?

(1) Personnel may be affected by the point of view here expressed by

(A) Actual participation of people having this point of view in the planning and administrative process. This may take place, and probably should take place, at two stages. First, at the top among those administrators who are responsible for the organization of programs and policy. Secondly, in the field, where people with this point of view might be given responsible positions in the application of programs in the field. Specifically, this latter might take the form of having as a part of the technical advisory staff of the local county planning programs a representative familiar with this point of view, or it may as in the case of certain work now being carried on in the Southwest take the form of having people specially trained take over administrative positions. The limited number of cultural anthropologists now available to assume these positions probably precludes any great contribution in this direction at this time.



- (B) Personnel may also be affected by education. To this end a course in cultural anthropology might be added to the graduate school of the Department. Lectures and discussions dealing with the point of view might be introduced into the present schools of Philosophy being conducted by the Department. Conferences such as the one now adjourning are another medium of such communication and would allow for widening the contributions to be made from the academic field. In order to continue and expand the contacts established by the present meeting some machinery should be established which will facilitate the further exchange of ideas and the establishment of common grounds of understanding.

(2) New personnel may be developed for this type of work.

- (A) By arrangements with the universities, whose students can be made aware of the possibilities of government careers for those having adequate training. School administrators should assume some responsibility for keeping their students informed of Civil Service and other qualifying regulations.
- (B) Courses embodying the point of view here expressed might be introduced into the curriculum of the land grant colleges.
- (C) It is not conceivable that the cultural anthropologists can provide any great number of adequately trained personnel for dissemination of this point of view. Anthropology has, on the other hand, no monopoly on such a point of view or method of approach. It is, in final analysis, simply a method of science and a way of looking at society, both of which characteristics are now or can easily be made a part of the equipment of the other social sciences. Other disciplines dealing with the phenomena of social or cultural behavior should be enlisted to provide personnel who can contribute within the integrated pattern or viewpoint discussed during these meetings.

